



Humanistic Judaism

Magazine

Grace Paley

**2018–2019 SHJ Humanistic
Jewish Role Model**

Sexual Ethics for the 21st Century

with Rabbi Jeffrey L. Falick

A Retrospective: SHJ@50

with Rabbi Miriam Jerris

Community News

and much more

Summer 2019

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Cover photo: courtesy of Nora Paley; photoillustration by Raya Kridel

From the Editor

Welcome to the Summer 2019 issue of *Humanistic Judaism*.

In this issue, we celebrate the literary legacy of the 2018–2019 Humanistic Jewish Role Model, author and secular leftist social critic Grace Paley. And, fresh on the heels of the SHJ@50 Conference in late April, we showcase some of the “best of” the conference—and we hope to continue to share insights from the conference over the coming year.

On Grace Paley, writer Mark Swartz gives us an assessment of Paley’s life and literary work. Paley was profoundly affected by Jewish culture and literature, and Jewish themes and references appear throughout her writing, including a piece entitled “Midrash on Happiness.” In addition to Swartz’s review, the Society has provided a wide array of resources to help you encounter and appreciate Paley’s writing. And on a continued literary note, we reproduce in this issue a selection from Swartz’s recently-published book set at a Jewish summer camp, *Summertime Jews*.

We are also excited to share two “best of” pieces from the SHJ@50 Conference. Rabbi Miriam Jerris addressed attendees, giving them an insider’s view of the first fifty years of the Society for Humanistic Judaism, along with a list of lessons learned “at the foot of Mount Sherwin.” We are happy to reproduce her remarks here.

In September 2018, the Association for Humanistic Rabbis released “A Statement on Sexual Ethics for the 21st Century.” Rabbis Jeffrey Falick and Denise Handlarski presented this statement and a discussion of its development during a breakout session at the SHJ@50 Conference. Rabbi Falick subsequently wrote an in-depth commentary on the statement, including the reasoning behind it, and present in this issue both the statement and Rabbi Falick’s comments.

As always, we have community news items to share from around the movement—including several communities’ programs on Grace Paley or on other literary pursuits.

We take a moment here as well to run a correction: in the Spring 2019 issue, SHJ President Dr. Richard Logan and Rabbi Jeremy Kridel, this magazine’s editor, collaborated on an article that incorrectly characterized female genital mutilation, terming it “female circumcision” and comparing it to male circumcision practices among the Maasai, without also mentioning the great harm that results from female genital mutilation and the exertion of male sexual power over women in Maasai society. They recognize and apologize for their error, and express their thanks for this correction. 🔥



J. M. K.

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An Exploration of the Humanist Rabbis' Statement on Sexual Ethics for the 21st Century

Rabbi Jeffrey L. Falick

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During the summer of 2018, the Association of Humanistic Rabbis (AHR) issued a wide-ranging and comprehensive modern statement about sexual ethics. After countless years of religious lawmaking, our Humanistic approach is the first one written by clergy to address the realities of modern sexual expression and relationships. For many years, I looked forward to the day when we would be prepared to make such a statement and I am gratified to have drafted the preliminary version. The full statement (located at the end of this article) represents our collective recommendations. Many colleagues contributed to the final statement and it received overwhelming support. However, what follows are my own reflections and do not necessarily represent those of the entire AHR.

If there is one aspect of life that traditional religions have sought to regulate it is sexual behavior. Whether preferring monogamy, limiting multiple spouses to men, or outright banning sex for anything but procreation, religion has inserted itself into every aspect of human sexuality. Fundamentalist religion does so in the extreme, corralling government to promote abstinence, ban science-based sex education, and restrict abortion. However, modern liberal religion, while nowhere near as controlling, has found its own ways to frown upon expressions of human sexuality that do not meet their standards.

Consider this excerpt from a Reform Jewish responsum (an answer to a Jewish legal or ethical inquiry) concerning extra-marital relationships:

...[I]t should be remembered that Judaism asks far more from each one of us than ethical behavior alone. It asks us to distinguish our sexual behavior in the most exalted—*kadosh* [holy]—context possible. This unequivocally implies that marriage should be the goal for our sexuality. It would as a consequence be inconsistent with our position to condone non-marital sexual relationships, since it is within marriage that the sexual union finds its true home of *kedushah* [holiness]. (CCAR 1995)

This kind of idea, still prevalent in the teachings of many religions, stands at odds with today's reality. And for Humanists like ourselves, statements like these are less than useless. The mere notion of employing a supernatural stamp of approval to constrain sexual expression is nonsensical. Reform rabbis may believe that Judaism "asks far more from each one of us than ethical behavior alone," but Humanists believe ethical behavior is our highest standard.

This past summer, the Association of Humanistic Rabbis broke with ages-old religious approaches to sexual relations by issuing a formal statement that grows out of our philosophy. As leaders of Humanistic communities, we have never hesitated to address controversial issues in the past, always providing guidance from positions that emphasize the dignity of all human beings and the preeminence of ethical behavior. By re-centering conversations about sex on ethics, we address two of our modern realities: our unprecedented sexual freedoms and our growing concern about sexual exploitation.

The drafters of our statement began with some basic ideas that guided our work. First among these was our insistence upon crafting inherently sex-positive recommendations. Sex positivity is best understood as a celebration of people's sexual choices so long as they always remain within the boundaries of consent and safety. We feel that shifting the discourse from religious superstition to the articulation of ethical limits is central to our role as Humanistic rabbis.

Doing so necessitates an acceptance—even an embrace—of the diversity of human sexual attitudes and behaviors. For this reason, our statement carries with it an implicit understanding that there are and always have been a wide variety of human sexual practices across history and geography. As a result, you will notice in the statement that we neither endorse nor disparage divergence from traditional Western monogamous exclusivity. Our statement is as respectful of polyamory (sexual relations not exclusively restricted to a pair-bonded couple) as it is of monogamy.¹

Much of our work was inspired by what we have learned about the evolution of human sexuality. Certainly, there is no denying that procreation is the ultimate goal of our sexual evolution, built into people just as surely as it is into other sexually-reproducing organisms. Yet the preponderance of evidence points to multiple explanations for how sex evolved in human beings, some of them having little or nothing to do with reproduction. For example, we know that 99% of all human sexual behavior is non-procreative; that human beings spend considerable time thinking



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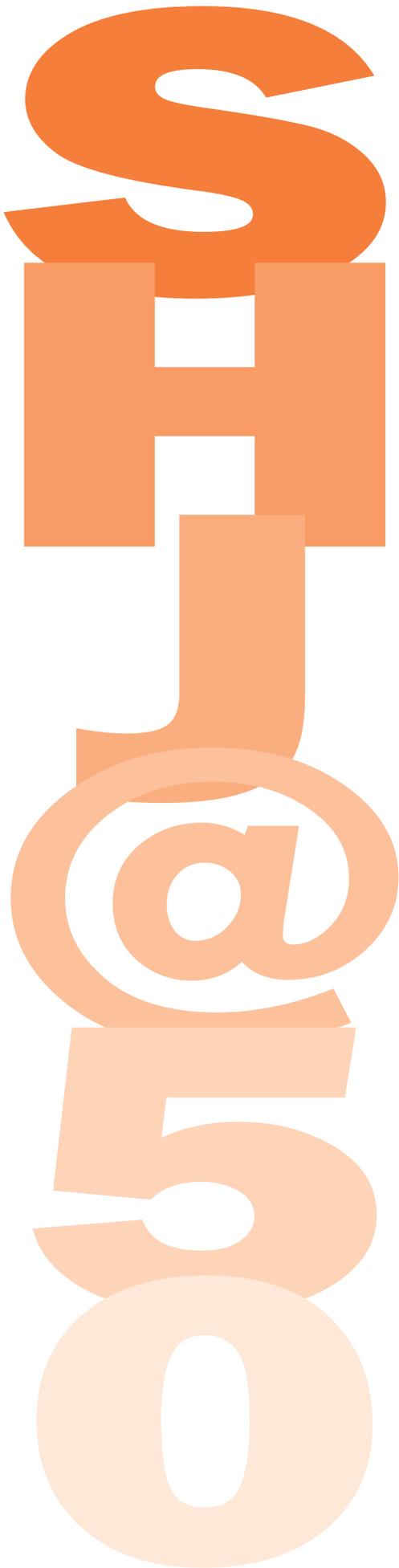
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A Retrospective: 50 Years of the Society for Humanistic Judaism

Rabbi Miriam Jerris

Thank you, Richard [Logan, President of the Society for Humanistic Judaism], and welcome dear friends to SHJ@50—the 50th Anniversary of the SHJ. My joyful task this evening is to give us a glimpse back in time to how Humanistic Judaism got its start.

Just shy of 60 years ago, a group of Jewish families from Windsor, Ontario, Canada, consulted with the leadership of Reform Temple Beth El in Detroit, Michigan and soon after Temple Beth El, Windsor was born, the first alternative to Orthodoxy in the small Jewish community of Windsor. My family was among the founders. And Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine, a young charismatic reform rabbi became our rabbi—became my rabbi. He was there at my bat mitzvah, my confirmation, my wedding (both of them), my children’s baby namings, B Mitzvahs, confirmations, and the wedding of my daughter, Alison, to Adam (Chalom). Rabbi Wine presided over my brother’s funeral, grandmother’s funeral, and sat in the front row at my mother’s funeral. Humanistic Judaism is important to almost all of us here to a greater or lesser degree, but for me, Sherwin Wine and Humanistic Judaism are deeply ingrained, the center of my ethical core and my heart.

Every religion, organization, relationship has an origin story, and the Birmingham Temple, Humanistic Judaism, and the Society for Humanistic Judaism are no exception. As we all know, some origin stories are mythical, some factual, but of mythical proportions, and some are just stories. According to the book, *Atheism for Dummies*, and as the story goes—Sherwin Wine stood before his Windsor, Ontario Reform congregation during a Saturday morning Shabbat, and declared his atheism and his intention to organize a humanistic Jewish congregation in Metro Detroit with a small number of families from the Windsor congregation (McGowan 2013). That’s cool, but not true. I know it isn’t true because 1) I was there; 2) Temple Beth El Windsor never had Saturday morning services; and 3) The Birmingham Temple began as a small-r “reform” congregation with a number of young families from Temple Beth El Detroit who were seeking a suburban congregation. As we now know, Sherwin Wine had his own ideas about what this new congregation would be.

You can read the rest of the story. It is written in a primary source document of Humanistic Judaism, in the book *Life of Courage*, written in honor of Sherwin Wine’s 65th birthday (Cohn-Sherbock 2003).

Two early highlights, which led directly to the formation of the Society. In the *Detroit Free Press*: December 3, 1964. The headline: “Suburban Rabbi: ‘I am an Atheist’”—it was then that Sherwin introduced the term ignostic as, and I am quoting him: “When someone speaks of god, I answer; ‘I don’t know what you mean and cannot determine whether your statement is true or false—that is

agnosticism.” Although Rabbi Wine used the term throughout his life, it didn’t have the staying power or the same sensationalism as the term “atheist.”

The second highlight was when *Time* magazine, on January 29 1965, ran a one-page article entitled, “The Atheist Rabbi.” Rabbi Wine was not on the cover—that too was part of the mythology. The article addressed the voices of a few other rabbis in the area, threatening to “defrock” him. The Reform movement did not then or now kick rabbis out of the rabbinate if they did not believe in God. Rabbi Wine may have been the only Reform rabbi talking about it and getting press, but he was not the only rabbi who held his philosophical position. At about the same time, Rabbi Daniel Friedman was talking about Rational Judaism at Congregation Beth Or in Deerfield, Illinois.

After the news stories, people from all over the world wrote to the Birmingham Temple asking about congregations in their area. It was ultimately decided to create an umbrella organization to respond to these queries. Corporation papers establishing the Society for Humanistic Judaism were filed with the State of Michigan in July of 1969.

The first conference of the SHJ was held in a suburban Detroit hotel on the first weekend of May 1970. Rabbi Wine, Rabbi Friedman, and members of the Westport, Connecticut Congregation for Humanistic Judaism, including founders John and Jeanne Franklin, came together for the first time to begin building the connections that formed the foundation of today’s organization—twenty-five affiliated communities and hundreds of independent (individual) members in the United States, Canada, and throughout the world.

In 1982, I became the first Executive Director of the Society. I fought for the title, believe me. There was a very strong, primarily male contingent maintaining that the title should be Executive Secretary. Eventually, I convinced the Board that given the salary they were offering, the least they could do was give the position a prestigious (and appropriate) title.

I spent those years traveling, first with Sherwin and then alone, helping communities develop throughout North America. Thirteen years later, I returned to graduate school to pursue my dream to become a rabbi. I was followed by the extraordinarily dedicated and capable Bonnie Cousens, who became the Society’s Executive Director for twenty years. We were a very small staff. And we always relied on a talented and committed volunteer community, which we nurtured, valued and appreciated (and still do).

In those days, we used to say, “There are no Humanistic Jewish emergencies”—until one Sunday morning in July 2007, when we received the devastating news that our charismatic founder and leader, Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine, had been killed in a car crash in Morocco. Sherwin was in many ways indescribable. He was brilliant, creative, tireless, visionary and driven—and had a most delicious sense of humor. He was one of the most eloquent speakers of his generation—no notes except his 4x6 card.

Sherwin had a way of recruiting people. He would look at you intently with those dark eyes and say, “I need you to do this.” (How many of us in this room were the recipients of that penetrating stare?)





We didn't dare say "no." He built us up and made us shine. And that is how the movement grew. When he died, people asked, "Who will replace him?" Rabbi Adam Chalom offered, "None of us and all of us." My response was, "Sherwin taught us how to be leaders and what to do." And he did.

In the early days, Rabbi Wine led his congregation through the steps of creating an entirely new liturgical system. He recognized the attachments individuals had to blessings over candles, wine and *challah* (bread), as well as the *Shema* and *Kaddish*, in particular. Rabbi Wine also understood the value of participating in thousands of years of Jewish tradition. How does one stay rooted and connected to our heritage, while making Jewish life vibrant, meaningful and relevant today? How do we both celebrate our roots and spread our wings? That question was significant then and now.

Within a year, the liturgy was transformed. The *Shema* and *Kaddish* and all forms of traditional prayer were dropped from the services. Rabbi Wine began to write "meditations" and "songs," all following the commitment of saying what we believed and believing what we said. One of the first songs he wrote was called: "Where is My Light? *Ayfo Oree?*"

The commitment to an integrity among thought, speech, and action is what makes Humanistic Judaism distinctive. There were other Jewish philosophers and rabbis who shared a human-centered approach, but Sherwin Wine insisted that the language we used should follow and be consistent with the philosophy we articulated. When a set liturgy is no longer required, the freedom to create words of profound meaning and inspiration is one of SHJ's most enriching possibilities for growth and fulfillment. The liturgy developed over time and drew on five major sources. This new liturgy provided a wellspring of compelling and beautiful things for us to say and sing.

The material was derived from the following sources:

1. Jewish tradition, without significant change;
2. Contemporary North American, Israeli, and Yiddish poetry and music, also without significant change;
3. Ancient and contemporary music, poetry, and prose adapted for consistency with Humanistic Judaism;
4. Material from the general secular culture; and
5. New creations written specifically for Humanistic Judaism.

What captivated early adherents to Humanistic Judaism still makes powerful and significant differences in the lives of cultural and secular Jews today. The philosophy endures. Shortly after Rabbi Sherwin T. Wine died at the age of 79, I wrote an article entitled, "Lessons Learned at the Foot of Mt. Sherwin." These are the lessons, and they still ring loud and true today:

1. Integrity

Integrity refers to the consistency among belief, word, and action. We have already discussed this idea within the context of a non-theistic, human-centered liturgy with humanistic blessings, relevant reflections, and songs that are both beautiful and true. This distinction provides the philosophical foundation of our existence.

2. We Are Our Behavior

Observing behavior is the shortest route to discovering what people really believe. When the words individuals speak and their behavior are not consistent, behavior is most often telling the "truth."

3. Believing Is Better Than Not Believing

From the very early days of Humanistic Judaism until this day, it has often been easier for people to describe us by what we don't believe, rather than the

things we affirm. It also may be more provocative for reporters to approach us that way. Humanistic Jews believe in many things: the right to make decisions independent of a supernatural authority, the obligation to make this world a better and safer place, and that history is a human saga, to suggest a few.

4. “I Don’t Know” is a Legitimate Response to a Question

If we are uncertain about what is true, the default answer is not a supernatural one. We simply may not have enough information or evidence to determine what is true. Therefore, “I don’t know” is not only the most honest response, it may also be the only rational response. Not knowing provides mystery and challenge. And if we’ve learned anything in the past few years, we have learned that #truthmatters.

5. Alphabet Soup is Delicious

As the Society for Humanistic Judaism and the movement grew, new organizations were developed. Each organization was accompanied by a set of initials. For example, SHJ is Society for Humanistic Judaism. The IISHJ (the International Institute for Secular Humanistic Judaism), the AHR (Association of Humanistic Rabbis), etc... We are continuing that tradition. In 2018, we added JFASD to the alphabet soup when we organized the Jews for a Secular Democracy.

6. Human Dignity Provides Meaning of Life

Answering the question, “What is the meaning of life?” is never easy. It is also not as difficult it seems. If human dignity is always the measure for ethical decisions, then the support and the promotion of human dignity is a strong answer to that daunting and seemingly impossible question. Human dignity is the reason that Humanistic Judaism has always openly officiated and co-officiated at marriages of Jews to those not born Jewish. It is why all members, whether Jewish or not, are treated as equal members of our organizations. Human dignity is the reason that LGBTQ individuals have always been embraced and supported. Human dignity is why prospective rabbis or leaders in our movement are not required to be dating or married to a Jew.

7. Hope is a Choice

When we are faced with the death of loved ones, with senseless mass shootings on a weekly basis, with mean spirited-rhetoric, and lack of compassion for those suffering at home and abroad, despair and depression are normal responses. Whenever we despair of life, Rabbi Sherwin Wine’s poem, “Hope is

a Choice” reminds us that we always have a choice in how we respond to life circumstances. Wine wrote:

*...Hope is a choice,
never found,
never given,
always taken.
Some wait for hope to capture them.
They act as the prisoners of despair.
Others go searching for hope.
They find nothing but the reflection of their own anger.
Hope is an act of will,
affirming, in the presence of evil,
that good things will happen,
preferring in the face of failure, self-esteem to pity.
Optimists laugh, even in the dark
They know that
hope is a life style-
not a guarantee. (Wine 2003, 31)*

In 1988, a liturgy book written by Sherwin T. Wine called *Celebration* was published. The book contained all of Sherwin Wine’s Shabbat and holiday celebrations and life cycle ceremonies encompassing, birth, marriage, B Mitzvahs, and death. For the last 40 years, this was the only compendium of original liturgy written by and for Humanistic Jews. Today we are pleased to introduce our new liturgy book, *Here Is Our Light*. This book contains original selections for holidays and life cycles from twenty-two different people. This is our legacy: from one to many. 

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Grace Paley's Midrash on Happiness

Mark Swartz

I. The Pantheon

A few names are guaranteed to be included in any chronicle of Jewish American Literature's Greatest Generation. Saul Bellow (1915–2005) and Philip Roth (1933–2018) can duke it out at the top of the list. J. D. Salinger (1919–2010), Norman Mailer (b. Nachem Malech Mailer; 1923–2007), and Arthur Miller (1915–2005), not as readily identified as Jewish, will turn up, too. And while Woody Allen (1935–) in spite of his personal failings, largely belongs to the entertainment world, his writings qualify as literary enough for his name to be inscribed, too, if only for the influence he has had.

Not to overgeneralize, but all of these figures are “bad Jews.” Although Bellow believed in God, he was unobservant and wrote, in his travelogue *To Jerusalem and Back*, “A great deal of intelligence can be invested in ignorance when the need for illusion is deep” (Goldman 2008). In a documentary on atheism, Miller reported, “I tried to be a religious person for about two years, when I was 13, 14. And then it simply vanished. I lay down one evening to go to sleep, and I woke up, and it wasn't there anymore” (Miller 2012). Roth told an interviewer, “When the whole world doesn't believe in God, it'll be a great place” (Braver 2019).

II. Paley's Religion

Grace Paley (1922–2007) most definitely deserves to be included in this pantheon, but she is far less well known, probably on account of her relatively scant output and her dedication to short stories rather than novels, as well as her gender. As a writer, I find more inspiration and appeal in Paley's work than in any of her Greatest Generation peers. Moreover, I find her Jewishness more aligned with Secular Humanistic Judaism, though she doesn't seem to have encountered the movement. While she rejected theism—or, probably, never believed at all—she drew steady nourishment from Jewish tradition.

Paley was chosen as the SHJ 2018–2019 Humanistic Jewish Role Model because:

Her values were expressed in action. She did not look to a higher power to solve the issues and problems of the day. Her behavior reflected her secular belief system. She was Jewish through and through and when she moved to Vermont, away from New York City where you could express your connection to being Jewish in the streets,



she sought out Jewish community where she could find it, rather than abandoning her identity. (Society for Humanistic Judaism 2019)

In a 1987 interview, Paley recalled, “My family was atheist, all of them, except my grandmother. And my father and my mother really believed in their Socialist ideals. The Enlightenment crawled across Europe, and when it reached them, they were home at last” (G. Paley 1987). Atheism crops up in her stories from time to time, as in the story “Living,” when a woman tries to console a friend’s son at the his mother’s funeral. “Ellen must be so proud of you,” she says. His response: “She’s not anything of anything” (G. Paley 2017, 73).

Paley’s “religion,” so to speak, was rooted in socialism and social justice. As Alexandra Schwartz writes in a 2017 *New Yorker* profile, “Politics ran in Paley’s blood. Her childhood was ‘rather typical Jewish socialist’ in that she believed Judaism and socialism to be one and the same” (Schwartz 2017).

Nora Paley, the writer’s daughter, has written, “The phrase ‘The Personal is political,’ which came out of the late ‘60s and early ‘70s, described to me the culture of my family and community in the very pre-affluent Greenwich Village. I assumed it originated in Jewish scripture (we were atheists)” (N. Paley 2017, 362). The author’s daughter told me in an e-mail, “Although not an observant Jew in the strict sense, she read and told us Old Testament stories often. We never had any doubt about our Jewishness. I was always proud to be in a line of moral, generous, ethical thinkers, which is how I saw Jewishness as a kid.”

Paley devoted far more time and energy to activism than the better-known writers of her generation. (She also almost certainly spent more time being a parent.) In 1961, she led her Greenwich Village PTA in protests against atomic testing and worked extensively with the War Resister’s League, which counseled young draft resisters—“among other less legal activities,” as Nora told me. Paley also founded the Greenwich Village Peace Center with several neighbors. In 1966, she was jailed for civil disobedience. Her activism continued through

her cofounding, in the 1980s, of the Jewish Women’s Committee to End the Occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, and protests against the Iraq War in 2007, the year she died (G. Paley 2017, 365–68).

III. Paley’s Writing

We don’t, however, remember Paley just for her impressive record of protests and marches. Her writing is what counts. For me, it’s her short stories (for others, her poetry and essays matter most), despite or because there just aren’t that many of them. She published only three slim collections, widely spaced apart: *The Little Disturbances of Man* (1959), *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute* (1974), and *Later the Same Day* (1985).

Many of her best stories explicitly address Jewish cultural and historical issues. “The Loudest Voice” concerns a Jewish girl assigned a role in her school’s Christmas pageant. Her parents debate whether it’s appropriate to participate: “You’re in America!” The father declares. “Clara, you wanted to come here. In Palestine the Arabs

would be eating you alive. In Europe you had pogroms. Argentina is full of Indians. Here you got Christmas.... Some joke, ha!” (G. Paley 2017, 31)

“Zagrowsky Tells” invokes the Abraham and Isaac story (also reinterpreted by Allen and Roth, among others): “You remember one son he sent out of the house altogether, the other he was ready to chop up if he only heard a noise in his head saying, Go! Chop!” (G. Paley 2017, 181)

In “The Used-Boy Raisers,” Paley’s recurring character and alter ego, Faith Darwin (a hard-to-miss secular surname) states, “Jews have one hope only—to remain a remnant in the basement of world affairs—no, I mean something else—a splinter in the toe of civilization, a victim to aggravate the conscience” (G. Paley 2017, 57).

My favorite of Paley’s short stories is barely a story at all—it’s almost an essay, but a few sparse details of New York streets suggest a vast, complex narrative. It begins... No. To summarize or quote from “Midrash on Happiness” is to do it (and us) a disservice. It must be



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2018–2019 SHJ Humanistic Jewish Role Model

Resources



Grace Paley

Birth: December 11, 1922

Death: August 22, 2007

- ◉ Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Grace_Paley
- ◉ Jewish Women's Archive, "Birth of Author Grace Paley": <https://jwa.org/thisweek/dec/11/1922/grace-paley>
- ◉ Encyclopedia.com: <https://www.encyclopedia.com/people/literature-and-arts/american-literature-biographies/grace-paley>
- ◉ Carol White, "For Grace Paley, Writing's a Risky, Mysterious Business," *Chicago Tribune*, April 21, 1985: http://articles.chicagotribune.com/1985-04-21/entertainment/8501230620_1_grace-paley-stories-feminist-writer
- ◉ *A Grace Paley Reader: Reading Resources*
The author of this superb article gives an excellent analysis of Paley's work. It also provides the most resources of any other source, video as well as written. There are resources in here that would make excellent programs for smaller communities and for smaller gatherings in larger communities: <https://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/language-literature-culture/great-jewish-book-club/2017-great-jewish-books-book-club-resources/grace>
- ◉ Anita Norich, "Grace Paley," Jewish Women's Archive: <https://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/paley-grace>
- ◉ Alexandra Schwartz, "The Art and Activism of Grace Paley," *New Yorker*, May 2017: <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2017/05/08/the-art-and-activism-of-grace-paley>
- ◉ "Featured Author: Grace Paley," *New York Times*, October 30, 2001: <http://www.nytimes.com/books/98/04/19/specials/paley.html>
- ◉ PBS Video Interview, February 2, 2004: <https://www.pbs.org/video/profile-grace-paley/>
- ◉ *New York Times* Obituary: <https://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/23/books/23cnd-paley.html>
- ◉ *Grace Paley: Collected Shorts*, 2009, a documentary film directed by Lily Rivlin, was presented at the Woodstock International Film Festival and other festivals in 2010. The film contains interviews with Paley and friends, footage of her political activities, and readings from her fiction and poetry: <http://www.gracepaleythefilm.com/>

Articles About Grace Paley

- ◉ Victoria Aarons, “A Perfect Marginality: Public and Private Telling in the Stories of Grace Paley,” *Studies in Short Fiction* 27, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 35–43
- ◉ Judith Areana, *Grace Paley’s Life Stories: A Literary Biography*, 1993
- ◉ Minako Baba, “Faith Darwin as Writer-Heroine: A Study of Grace Paley’s Short Stories,” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 7, no. 1 (Spring 1988): 40–54
- ◉ Rose Kamel, “To Aggravate the Conscience: Grace Paley’s Loud Voice,” *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 11 (1989): 305–319
- ◉ Bonnie Lyons, “Grace Paley’s Jewish Miniatures,” *Studies in American Jewish Literature* 8, no. 1 (Spring 1989): 26–33
- ◉ Martha Satz, “Looking at Disparities: An Interview with Grace Paley,” *Southwest Review* 72 (Autumn 1987): 478–489
- ◉ Jacqueline Taylor, *Grace Paley: Illuminating the Dark Lives*, 1990

Selected Works by Grace Paley

- ◉ *The Little Disturbances of Man* (1959)
- ◉ *Enormous Changes at the Last Minute* (1974)
- ◉ *Later the Same Day* (1985)
- ◉ *Leaning Forward: Poems* (1985)
- ◉ *365 Reasons Not to Have Another War* (1988)
- ◉ *Long Walks and Intimate Talks* (1991)
- ◉ *New and Collected Poems* (1992)
- ◉ *The Collected Stories* (1994)



CommunityNews

- ◉ **Or Emet**—Minneapolis, MN
- ◉ **Baltimore Jewish Cultural Chavurah**—Baltimore, MD
- ◉ **Kahal B'raira**—Boston, MA
- ◉ **Adat Chaverim**—Encino, CA
- ◉ **Beth Ami**—Boulder, CO
- ◉ **Secular Humanist Jewish Circle**—Tucson, AZ
- ◉ **Machar, The Washington Congregation for Secular Humanistic Judaism**—Washington, D.C.

Remembering Lionel Davis: A Recipe for a Good Life

Or Emet mourns Lionel's loss on December 23. Lionel was a gifted musician and social justice advocate who generously gave his talents to Or Emet and the Twin Cities community. Just a few weeks before his death, Lionel played piano accompaniment for Or Emet's Shabbat service—as he had done for many years. Fortunately, he graciously posed for a photo from that impromptu appearance. Lionel and Edith (1923–2008) truly made a difference in Or Emet and the world throughout their long, impactful lives.

When you are 95 years old you might have thoughts about your life and a perspective that is worth sharing with your family and community. Luckily for Or Emet, Lionel Davis offered us the opportunity to ponder his wisdom. As his daughter, Peggy Davis, wrote, "Lionel was not much of a cook, but during his last day he spoke in a grand manner, very much as I imagined Jacob speaking to his sons on his deathbed. He addressed not just us, who were present, but all of you as well, with his recipe for a good life."

Recipe for a Good Life

Ingredients:

- ◉ Find work that meshes your skills with that which you love.
- ◉ Find friends who share your interests; even better when you have more than one thing in common.
- ◉ Have friends of different ages.
- ◉ Be friendly to others. Don't be shy about connecting with people. Ask questions and listen to them. Remember some details for the next time you meet.
- ◉ Have an agenda going forward—the next book to read, the next music to learn, the next protest to attend. This will help keep you optimistic.
- ◉ Pay attention to current events, learn history, have opinions.
- ◉ Know that through your life, you will evolve.
- ◉ Maintain balance in your primary relationships, supporting each other and pursuing your personal interests and activities.
- ◉ Honor your family connections.
- ◉ If you don't have family, create one, and maintain these connections through your life.
- ◉ You can learn new things, even in your 80s and 90s.
- ◉ Visit the aged and sick. Bring your children along.
- ◉ Spend time with your hands in the earth; grow food or flowers. Bend your knees every day.
- ◉ For worriers, he said, "Stop worrying, and put that energy into being involved in changing the world!"

Peggy's eulogy closed with this advice: Lionel summarized his counsel to all of us by saying, "Go out and save the world!"

Thank You Lionel, for all you gave to Or Emet, and for leaving us with ingredients to ponder as we continue onward toward *tikkun olam*. 🍂

Recipe for a Good Life published with permission from Peggy H. Davis.



Grace Paley's Writings and Life Inspires Baltimore Jewish Cultural Chavurah

The Baltimore Jewish Cultural Chavurah celebrated International Women's Day (March 8, 2019) with a discussion of two works by this year's Humanistic Jewish Role Model, Grace Paley:

- In the short story "The Loudest Voice," Paley used humor to highlight the ironies of a public-school Christmas play, whose entire cast consists of immigrant Jewish children, and of their parents' reactions to this "sharing" of Christian culture.
- "Injustice" was an autobiographical essay of her specific experience in a Socialist youth organization during the Great Depression. Her descriptions of the times and its lessons, brought us immediately into that period.

We shared our own experiences from when we were growing up. Our families of origin ranged from socialist/secular/cultural to observant Jews who were immigrants and first-generation Americans. We grew up in a variety of settings, from predominantly Jewish communities to being one of a few Jews in a school or town. Some people were so surrounded by the Jewish community that they didn't really experience being a minority until college. Some public schools had "present" attendance sheets for the few non-Jews who attended classes on High Holidays. Others shared incidents of bewilderment/frustration/alienation of growing up in a predominantly non-Jewish setting. The month of getting ready for Christmas activities at school as well as coping with the question, "What is Santa giving you this year?" were stressful. Our discussion moved to the reality of these situations today, assimilation, and the ways in which traditions have evolved.

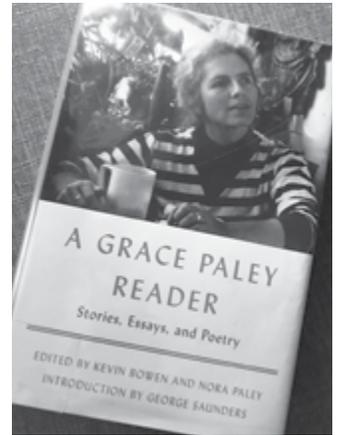
Grace Paley truly sparked our group's interest, and so we are planning to learn more about her life and work through the following documentaries:

1. "Grace Paley: Collected Shorts" directed by Lilly Rivlin
<https://www.brandeis.edu/bnc/learning/deis-flicks.html>

In collaboration with the National Center for Jewish Film on the Brandeis campus, the Brandeis National Committee has assembled a lending library of DVDs. The Deis Flicks collection includes both the work of modern independent filmmakers and archival material. Films are available for rental.

2. gracepaleyvideo.com "Grace"—produced and directed by Sonya Friedman
To download this film: <https://vimeo.com/ondemand/gracepaley>
To purchase the DVD: <https://www.createspace.com/850048737> 🔥

Arlene Ogurick



"Let Us Go Forth With Fear and Courage and Rage to Save the World"

This year, Kahal B'raira (Boston, MA) celebrated the life of Grace Paley as Humanistic Jewish Role Model "because her values were expressed in action. She did not look to a higher power to solve the issues and problems of the day. Her behavior reflected her secular belief system." We held a workshop in her honor, with a PowerPoint presentation and discussion focusing on her life and activism, through her words and photographs.

KB highlights the annual Role Model during a Sunday Morning Program. Authors and professors have given lectures. Sometimes we have watched videos (a video of Carl Sagan called "A Universe Not Made For Us" spoke directly to so many of us, there was hardly a dry eye present).

Some years back, to increase the number of community gatherings and to provide a way for more mixed generational activities, we developed "All KB Morning." Among other activities, we break out into smaller workshop groups. These could be anything from *charoset* recipes from around the world to learning key words in American Sign Language. It was during All KB morning 2018 that we held our Grace Paley workshop.

Presentations of the Role Model of the Year always segue into a review of past SHJ Role Models, and a review of resources available on the SHJ website.

A great benefit of the HJ Role Model program is its introduction to so many interesting people who would have otherwise remained unknown. So far, KBers have been responsible for pointing out two people who have become nominees for the title. One is the result of a B Mitzvah project; the other, the result of a Purim presentation highlighting alternative female Jewish role models. 🔥

Jon Levine

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Jewish Environmental Ethics Explored by Adat Chaverim



A number of scholars and scientists trace the West's long history of environmental damage and animal cruelty to the biblical creation story, which positions humans as “alpha” earthlings who “rule the fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the cattle, the whole earth, and all the creeping things that creep on earth” (Gen. 1:26). When ecological concerns appear in traditional Jewish texts, they tend to be human-centered: only those plants, animals, or ecosystems perceived as valuable to people are of any concern.

This school year, Adat Chaverim, Los Angeles, devoted several sessions and ceremonies to exploring contemporary Jewish environmental thought, which challenges the traditional view. A series of cultural school and adult education classes examined the interconnectivity of the natural world, our relationships with nature, and the humanistic principle that we are responsible for solving the problems we cause—including climate change and the destruction of biodiversity.

On Tu B'shevat, we planted seeds and harvested micrograins at the hydroponic farm of one of our members. We visited the Los Angeles Zoo to evaluate the pros and cons of raising and keeping captive animals. The year ended at the hydroponic farm with a Havdalah celebration and potluck dinner, featuring vegetables we had planted. 

Left to right: Lee Mandell (proprietor of the hydroponic farm), Zach Rich, and Brenda Jeffreys. Photo credit: Rabbinic intern Michal Morris Kamil

Cantor Jonathan L. Friedmann, Ph.D.

A Unique Book Group Concept

The Readers Circle at Beth Ami, Colorado Congregation for Humanistic Judaism, is different! With most book groups, everyone reads the same book. In our Readers Circle, we each bring a book we have already read with a broad Jewish theme. It can be fiction or non-fiction, a current best seller or a classic—reviewer's choice. At the get-together, we discuss how the themes are similar or contradictory. We explore how the books relate broadly to Judaism and/or Humanism, if at all. Attendees leave the discussion with a list of books they can't wait to read.

We held our first Readers Circle on the evening of April 3, 2019, with nine participants. For this first discussion, we didn't have presentation guidelines, but just let the conversation ebb and flow. We circulated a sign-up sheet to note the name of the book and the author. We talked for nearly three hours about the books, themes, authors, and Humanistic Judaism.

As follow-up, a short questionnaire was e-mailed to attendees, along with the list of books reviewed. The Readers Circle concept was well-received and was considered “original and exciting.” Everyone planned to attend future Readers Circles. One person commented, “I would even like to attend if I didn't read a book.” Although most book groups meet monthly, we plan to meet three to four times a year.

We also learned that participants want more structure and guidelines for their oral book review. We should limit the time each reviewer initially speaks to about five minutes with no interruptions. That leaves sufficient time for questions, clarifications, and discussion of themes.

I now have a wonderful list of books to read this summer. And we plan another Beth Ami Readers Circle in August. 

Arlene Gerwin



Passover Seder Includes Memories of Moden Exodus

"I think this was our best seder ever!!" That's what I kept hearing that day. Humanistic Rabbi Jack Silver, a member of our congregation, the Secular Humanist Jewish Circle of Tucson, AZ, led the seder with his usual depth of knowledge and wit.

Our host location, Atria Campana Del Rio Retirement Community, set our tables beautifully with seder plates for each table, wine and grape juice, and plenty of *matzah*, *charoset*, *maror*, and all the other symbols of the day. Elijah's and Miriam's cups were small silver wine cups that had been brought to America in the early 1900's by one member's grandmother as she escaped from the Cossacks with her four little children—another Exodus referenced in the ceremony echoing the ancient Israelite's legendary "Exodus."

As we read through the Hagaddah, members read their assigned parts and many of the nearly fifty of us enriched the seder by expanding on the meaningful ideas expressed in the Hagaddah. Our song leaders, the daughter and two grandchildren of members, inspired us all to participate in the singing.

A delicious roast chicken lunch was served after our reading, singing, and commentary-ing our way through the Hagaddah. The lunch was held in a different room so those attending had an opportunity to mix and mingle with different people.

A meaningful and lovely time was had by all!! 🔥

Becky Schulman



Machar and the Washington Ethical Society: Together for Passover

Machar members and our friends at the Washington Ethical Society (WES)—almost 120 combined—celebrated a Community Passover Seder together on April 21, 2019. Rabbi Jeremy Kridel and WES Senior Leader, Amanda Poppei, collaborated to write a new Haggadah for the occasion. We enjoyed music from WES music director, Bailey Whiteman, as well as familiar favorite tunes. Bailey led us in song, accompanied by Rabbi Jeremy on the guitar. Machar Education Director, Heather Gale, created a colorful, inviting art-and-activity table, visited enthusiastically by children and their grateful parents.



On-site volunteers made the Seder happen efficiently, including set-up crew, *charoset* chefs, kitchen-to-table crew, and clean-up crew. It was especially delightful to see kids from both congregations forming a team to organize the food as it arrived from the kitchen. The potluck dinner featured a bountiful supply of creatively and lovingly prepared food, all contributed by members from WES and Machar. WES members brought additional joy to our Seder tables by contributing more varieties of charoset! Each table had at least four different types.

It was a splendid event. Machar and WES members became acquainted and exchanged information about our respective organizations and customs. We have a lot in common, and learned a great deal from one another about our individual histories and practices.

We thank Rabbi Jeremy for reaching out to WES and for his leadership in making the joint Seder happen. Many thanks to all our volunteers for their indispensable contributions of time, labor, and talent. 🔥

Machar and WES members celebrate Passover together. Rabbi Jeremy leads the group in song.



Nadine Wettstein, Larry Lawrence, and Jack Schwartz

May 2018–April 2019

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To Pivnick/Glickman Family

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